

Thyroid screening

Thyroid screening, or TSH, screens for hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism.

Hypothyroidism is a condition that makes you feel tired. There is a gland in your neck called the thyroid gland. It makes thyroid hormone. This hormone controls how the body uses and stores energy.

Hypothyroidism is the medical term for when a person does not make enough thyroid hormone. People sometimes confuse this condition with HYPERTHYROIDISM, which is when a person makes too much thyroid hormone.

What are the symptoms of hypothyroidism?

Some people with hypothyroidism have no symptoms. But most people feel tired. That can make the condition hard to diagnose, because a lot of conditions can make you tired.

Other symptoms of hypothyroidism include:

- Lack of energy
- Getting cold easily
- Developing coarse or thin hair
- Getting constipated (having too few bowel movements)

If it is not treated, hypothyroidism can also weaken and slow your heart. This can make you feel out of breath or tired when you exercise and cause swelling (fluid buildup) in your ankles. Untreated hypothyroidism can also increase your blood pressure and raise your cholesterol – both of which increase the risk of heart trouble.

In women, hypothyroidism can disrupt monthly periods. It can also make it hard to get pregnant. In women who do get pregnant, hypothyroidism can cause problems. For instance, it can increase the chances of having a miscarriage. (A miscarriage is when a pregnancy ends on its own before the woman has been pregnant for 20 weeks.)

How is hypothyroidism treated?

Treatment for hypothyroidism involves taking thyroid hormone pills every day. After you take the pills for about 6 weeks, your doctor or nurse will test your blood to make sure the levels are where they should be. They might adjust your dose depending on the results. Most people with hypothyroidism need to be on thyroid pills for the rest of their life.

Thyroid hormone pills come in different brand name and generic forms. All the pills work equally well. But you should not switch from one generic or brand name to another. Switching between pills can cause your levels to go up and down.

Never change your dose of thyroid hormone on your own. Taking too much thyroid hormone can cause heart rhythm problems and even damage your bones.

What if I want to get pregnant?

You can try to get pregnant. Many women with hypothyroidism have healthy pregnancies. But your doctor or nurse will most likely need to change your dose of thyroid hormone once you are pregnant. That's because you need more thyroid hormone during pregnancy. They will also measure your levels of thyroid hormone 4 weeks after any change in your dose, and at least once during each trimester of pregnancy.

What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is a condition that can make you feel shaky, anxious, and tired. It happens when a gland in your neck, called the thyroid gland, makes too much thyroid hormone. This hormone controls how the body uses and stores energy.

Hyperthyroidism is the medical term for when a person makes too much thyroid hormone. People sometimes confuse this condition with HYPOTHYroidism, which is when a person does not make enough thyroid hormone.

What are the symptoms of hyperthyroidism?

Some people with hyperthyroidism have no symptoms. When they do occur, symptoms can include:

- Anxiety, irritability, or trouble sleeping
- Weakness (especially in the arms and thighs, which can make it hard to lift heavy things or climb stairs)
- Trembling
- Sweating a lot and having trouble dealing with hot weather
- Fast or uneven heartbeats
- Feeling tired
- Weight loss even when you are eating normally
- Frequent bowel movements

Untreated hyperthyroidism can cause a heart rhythm disorder called "atrial fibrillation," chest pain, and rarely, heart failure.

In women, hyperthyroidism can disrupt monthly periods. It can also make it hard to get pregnant. In men, hyperthyroidism can cause the breasts to grow or lead to sexual problems. These problems go away when hyperthyroidism is treated.

How is hyperthyroidism treated?

Hyperthyroidism can be treated with:

- **Medicines** – Two types of medicines can be used to treat hyperthyroidism:
 - Anti-thyroid medicines reduce the amount of hormone your thyroid gland makes.
 - Beta-blocker medicines help reduce the symptoms of hyperthyroidism. Beta-blockers can make you more comfortable until the thyroid imbalance is under control.
- **Radioactive iodine** – Radioactive iodine comes in a pill or liquid you swallow. It destroys much of the thyroid gland. Pregnant women should not use this treatment, because it can damage the baby's thyroid gland. But the treatment is safe for women who are not pregnant and for men. The amount of radiation used is small. It does not cause problems getting pregnant in the future or increase the risk of birth defects in future pregnancies.

Radioactive iodine can make eye bulging worse in people with Graves' disease, especially if they smoke cigarettes. If you have Graves' eye disease, your doctor

might suggest medicines instead of radioactive iodine, or might give you a different medicine (a steroid) before radioactive iodine to help prevent bulging of the eyes.

- **Surgery** – Doctors can do surgery to remove part or all of the thyroid gland. Doctors do not often recommend surgery, because the other treatment choices are safer and less costly. But surgery is the best choice in some cases.

Most people who are treated with radioactive iodine or who have surgery end up making too little thyroid hormone after treatment. They must take thyroid hormone pills after treatment – for the rest of their life.

What if I want to get pregnant

If you take anti-thyroid medicine, talk to your doctor or nurse before you start trying to get pregnant. You will probably need to take different medicines at different times in your pregnancy. Plus, your doses might need to be adjusted.

If you were treated with radioactive iodine, wait at least 6 months before you start trying to get pregnant. This will give your doctor enough time to find out if your thyroid is making enough thyroid hormone after the radioactive iodine treatment. If the radioactive iodine caused the thyroid to make too little thyroid hormone, you will need to take thyroid hormone pills. It is important to have a normal amount of thyroid hormone in your body before getting pregnant.

Whatever treatment you use, you should have your thyroid hormone levels checked often during pregnancy. Thyroid hormone levels must be at the right level during pregnancy to avoid risks to both the mother and the baby.